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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

[To accompany bill S. 607.]

LETTER

FROM

T. J. BOWEN, ESQ.,

TO PROVIDE

For the exploration of the river Niger, in Africa.

FEBRUARY 18, 1857.—Ordered to be printed.

WASHINGTON, *February* 4, 1856.

DEAR SIR: Your note of yesterday has been brought in this morning, and I proceed at once to answer your inquiries.

The extensive country of Sudan, or Central Africa, lying on both sides of the Niger, is very different, in most respects, from Western Africa, or Guinea. The surface of the country is generally undulating; the soil more or less productive; the streams numerous, clear, and rocky; and the scenery beautiful. Most of the country is open and grassy, with scattering trees, which gives it very much the appearance of mesquite prairies in western Texas. So far as I have seen and heard from native travellers, there are no chains of mountains of considerable length; but short chains and patches of mountainous hills are common in some districts, and we frequently meet with isolated hills, some of which are immense masses of granite, arising abruptly from the plain. The elevation of the land, as we proceed from the coast, is gradual, so as to be favorable to the opening of roads, and yet so rapid that Captain Clapperton saw frost and ice in the Hausac ountry within twelve degrees of the equator. The Puloh (or Fellatah) people, who inhabit that country, have told me of ice, which they call *galada*. Wheat is a common crop on the table lands of Hausa and Kaniké, (or Burnn.)

The people of Sudan are of two classes, called in that country "black men" and "red men." The latter may be described as woolly headed Indians. They are numerous on both sides of the Niger, amounting, perhaps, in all, to twenty or thirty millions; some of them, as the Pulohs, are Mohammedans, but others, mentioned, like many of the blacks in Sudan, are heathens.

Central Africa includes numerous kingdoms, most of which acknowledge the authority of the Puloh emperor, who resides at Sokoto. These countries are generally populous. Some of their numerous towns are very extensive, but we can scarcely make a satisfactory conjecture as to the number of inhabitants.

Abbeokuta, about sixty miles from the sea in the little kingdom of Egba, has been measured. It is nearly four miles in length, from one and a half to three miles in breadth, and perhaps twelve miles in circuit. Our estimates of the population vary from sixty thousand to one hundred thousand.

Between Abbeokuta and the Niger, that is, within a distance of one hundred and sixty miles, there are more than a dozen large towns, some of which are more populous than Abbeokuta. The greatest of these in reputation, if not in size also, is Ilorrin, the capital of a little Puloh kingdom of the same name. Here there are many red or light colored people, and thousands of men who can read and write. Arabic the only kind of writing known in Sudan. Large towns are found in Barba, (or Borghoo,) Nupe, Iakobu, Hausa, Kanike, and various other kingdoms. But, according to the people Ilorrin, the largest of all African towns is Ohwoh, six days journey (say one hundred miles) beyond the Niger. We have not yet been able to visit this town, owing to the pressure of other business.

Central African houses are built in Moorish style, large and low, with many rooms opening into an interior court. The walls are made of clay, which bakes hard in the sun; and the roofs are generally thatched with grass. A single house contains from twenty to one hundred persons. In some respects the Sudanese are considerably advanced from mere barbarism. Whether heathens or Mohammedans, they are clad in trowsers and tunics. They are remarkably courteous in their social intercourse. Their women do not labor on the farms. Several rude arts are commonly practiced, as the smelting of iron, and in some places of copper and lead; the manufacture of hoes, axes, adzes, knives, and swords; the spinning of cotton and silk, (the latter a new article, worthy of our better acquaintance;) weaving and tailoring, both of which are regular professions; dying blue, yellow, and red; soap making; brewing corn and millet; making palm and grass hats; also, of saddles, bridles, and sandals, and a sort of shoes and boots. Three towns in Nufe have the art of working in glass, and they produce an article which, it is said, cannot be successfully imitated in Europe.

But the great business of the people is agriculture, in which they are far more skilful and industrious than we have supposed. The farms of some large cities extend to a distance of twenty-five miles from the town walls. The principal crops are Indian corn, the same as our own, and the tropical yarn. But they also plant cotton, sugar cane, beans and peas, sweet potatoes, cassava, ground peas, ginger, red pepper, &c.; and the country is admirably adapted to coffee and other tropical productions of great value to the civilized world.

The domestic animals are the same as our own—a fine breed of cattle, two kinds of sheep, the bearded ram being peculiar to that country, goats, hogs, horses, asses, &c. Some of the horses brought to

Ilorrin by the Moors and Arabs have sold, as I am assured, for one thousand dollars; but the price of a pony varies from fifteen to thirty dollars.

The Sudanese are not an indolent people. They rise early, and their daily markets are well stocked with provisions, animals, and all other articles known in the country. Another great branch of industry in Sudan is traffic. In my first journey to Ilorrin I travelled with a caravan of traders, which could not have numbered much less than three thousand persons. Large caravans are constantly arriving at Ilorrin from all directions, and the same is going on at all the other great centers of Central African trade. Their merchandise consists of innumerable things produced in the country, from the simple water gourd to the large elephant's tooth, which it requires two men to carry; and of many articles from Europe and America, from the tobacco pipe to the piece of red velvet, worth sixty dollars.

Some of the principal exports from Sudan, if the trade were opened, would be gold, ivory, gums, palm-oil, vegetable butter, hides, camwood, and indigo of unrivalled quality. Some of the imports would be various kinds of cloth, blankets, felt hats, coral beads, and other ornaments, tobacco—which is used by everybody, male and female—guns and gunpowder. All the millions of Central Africa desire to buy something, and all, by one means or another, could pay for it.

At present the principal foreign trade of the countries beyond the Niger is carried on across the great desert by means of camels.—(See McCulloh's Commercial Dictionary, and other similar authorities.) Moorish and Arabian merchants penetrate to every part of the country, and sometimes remain for years until they have grown wealthy. I saw persons of this class at Ilorrin, who professed to have been at Constantinople and Alexandria. One of them told me he had seen the flag of my country on the Mediterranean.

The people of western Sudan trade principally to the coast of Guinea. Being afraid to risk themselves among the savages along the coast, they meet them at such intermediate points as Kumasi and Gonja, and exchange the productions of Sudan for the manufactures of civilized nations. As the barbarians of Guinea derive great profit from this trade, they are anxious to preserve it, not only by keeping the Sudanese away from the coast, but by preventing white men from entering Sudan. When I attempted to reach the interior from Liberia, in 1850, I met with much trouble from this jealousy, and was finally compelled to return, after penetrating the country to a distance of ninety miles. This double fraud upon commerce injures both the Central African and the white man, while it is really no advantage to the Guinea man, whose debaucheries and barbarism increase with the increase of his wealth.

We may hope that before many years the commerce of Central Africa will be diverted from the paths of the desert and the forests of Guinea to its apparently natural outlet, the Niger. If this, or something analogous, cannot be done, one of the finest countries within the tropics must still remain cut off from the civilized world without a development of its great natural resources.

It is still a problem, however, whether the Niger can be made avail-

able for this purpose. Perhaps its navigation may be rendered impossible by rapids ; or the climate may be fatal to white men ; or the people might rob and murder our traders ; or the productions of the country may not be worth the cost of getting at them. All these are questions which nothing but facts can decide. Seven years ago the project of establishing Christian missions in central Africa was pronounced chimerical. Nearly four years were consumed in exploration. Our line of stations, commenced three years ago, now extends to the furthest borders of Yomba, the first division of Sudan. The problem has been solved, and our hopes more than realized.

One of the steamers in Laird and Oldfield's expedition ascended the Niger to Raba, in Nufe. With them, exploration was a secondary object, and they made no attempt to proceed further. If their design had been to explore the river to the head of navigation, they might, perhaps, have moored their boat at Sego or Kaba, two thousand miles from the sea, and have returned in triumph. But now their expedition stands recorded as a paralyzing failure.

The only place at which we have reason to fear obstruction is near Busa. Unfortunately, the Landers made but few useful observations; but we learn from them that the river here is not so rapid but that the natives are in the constant habit of paddling up it in their canoes. Lander himself went in a canoe from Busa to Yami, and descended thence to the sea. According to Caillé, the Niger above Timbuctoo is still several hundred yards in width, and affords good navigation. Park descended from above Timbuctoo in a vessel which he called a schooner, and lost his life at Busa, through the mistake of firing on the people, who are now known to be a harmless, well disposed race. It is very probable that a light draught steamer could ascend the Niger to Sego, more than fifteen hundred miles from the sea, at almost any season.

The Delta of the Niger is very sickly, but a steamer can soon pass through the swamps to an open and rocky country, similar to that which we now occupy in Yomba. Laird and Oldfield, intent on buying ivory, remained far too long in the low country, and the mortality of these men is plainly attributable to other causes besides malaria. The Chadda expedition, in 1854, returned to the coast without the loss of a single man by disease or accident.

There might be some danger of an attack from the Moors, at Timbucto ; but a very little powder and ball would probably bring them to terms. At the worst, there could be no real danger to the steamer ; and judging from the spirit of the Moors whom I have seen in Africa, those of Timbuctoo would hail the arrival of the steamer with joy. There is nothing to fear from the blacks. I live among them, within sixty miles of the Niger, in perfect security of life and property. We could reside on the banks of the river in equal security.

Neither Laird and Oldfield, nor the late Chadda expedition were able to make money by the adventure. The reason of their failure in this respect is very obvious. The centres of trade where the valuable commodities of the country are accumulated are not on the Niger, but at various distances from it, in the large cities which are sustained by the caravan traffic across the desert, and to the western coast. The

navigation of the Niger would create new centers of trade which would call the productions of the country to the banks of this stream, and the caravan trade to Tripoli and Guinea would be broken up. Every year would add to the civilization of the country and to the development of its resources, until, finally, the traffic with the millions of people in Central Africa would be worth millions of dollars per annum.

Truly, yours,

T. J. BOWEN.

Hon. E. B. WASHBURNE.

To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the Congress of the United States:

The undersigned, merchants and others, residing in Allegheny county, Pennsylvania, take the liberty respectfully, but earnestly, to call your attention to the condition and prospects of African trade, and to suggest measures which will increase the commerce of the United States with that rich and fertile country.

Africa is estimated to contain one hundred and sixty millions of people. It is possessed of materials for a large trade. In fact, one that may be called large already exists; and Great Britain, France, and even Germany, have been gleaning plentiful harvests. Of the entire trade of Africa, which is believed to represent annually one hundred millions of dollars, Great Britain enjoys, from the *west coast alone*, full twenty-five millions of dollars, while the American interest from the entire continent is only a little over three millions of dollars!

Your memorialists know of no good reason why African trade with the United States should be as small as it is, compared with that of the European powers named, or with what it appears probable that it might be when we remember how near Africa is to our own country, and that our merchandise and produce are coveted as eagerly as our own manufacturers and merchants covet a market.

It is submitted that the following measures will promote and secure American interests in the productions and trade of Africa, and at the same time, and with but a slight additional outlay, more effectually suppress all remaining slave trade upon the west African coast.

Your memorialists are satisfied that these plans, if adopted and vigorously supported by the United States, as they have been by Great Britain, will open a very extensive field for a legitimate, peaceful, and valuable commerce, and speedily lead to the civilization of the immense continent of Africa.

First. To increase the efficiency of the African squadron of our country by substituting two or more small steamers instead of the same number of sailing vessels, and to provide, as a branch of their duties, the occasional passage of one of such steamers up the navigable rivers to give encouragement and protection to lawful traders.

Second. The admission, free of duty, of all commodities of African growth and production directly entering American ports. The im-

portance of this request is enhanced by the fact that such of these articles as are most needed cannot be raised in the United States, that they are strictly "raw materials," and are used in several branches of American industry and manufactures.

Third. The establishment or employment of a line of steam propellers to the west coast of Africa, not to exceed one thousand tons burden each, to carry the mails and such passengers and freight as may offer; to depart monthly from such port or ports of this country as Congress may direct; and to touch, going and returning, at the prominent stopping places on the African seaboard as far south as the equator.

(*Signed by many thousands.*)